



TIME warp ... unchanging
Talleride; even beginners can ski
from the peak, and swinging

Sloping off to a time warp

IT'S DARK when we arrive. Throwing back the curtains at sunrise in the box canyon town of Telluride in Colorado, reveals a vista worthy of a Hollywood set, only this isn't manmade.

Snow-capped peaks thrust themselves from the valley floor to some 3000 metres, forming part of the San Juan Mountains and creating the backdrop for what is surely the most stunning ski village in North America.

This former mining town, founded in 1878, has one road in and out. Butch Cassidy took part in his first bank robbery at the San Miguel Bank that still stands in Telluride today. If only they had thrown up a road block they might have caught him before his career took off.

The valley floor is in a natural amphitheatre of granite and red sandstone peaks and is home to the town of Telluride with swinging cowboy saloons and Victorian houses. It's also a time warp. What's here is here and there will not be any more development.

Which also means that existing properties are worth a fortune. But it wasn't always this way.

When the mining stopped so did the town's economy, but a mid-1990s

Rachael Oakes-Ash visits a ski resort in the United States where cowboys and grey-haired hippies mingle with mountain folk and tourists

redevelopment meant land here became hot property as those seeking a remote ski destination deep in the mountains came knocking.

Grey-haired hippies and cowboys mingle with mountain folk and tourists. Bling is left at the door and everyone's on an even footing, until you hit the slopes with 680 hectares of challenging terrain with tree runs, steeps, powder bowls and moguls.

It may be 38 per cent advanced terrain but thanks to an impressive lift system, even beginners and intermediate skiers can ski from the peak with views to Utah down to the mountain village halfway up the mountain.

The Mountain Village is a swanky purpose-built ski-in, ski-out pedestrian resort founded in 1995 and settled by international hotels and apartments. It is linked to the valley floor by a gondola and guests must be back before the last ride at midnight, making it more suitable to families than party-goers. The Peaks Resort and Golden Door spa is enough to

Essentials

The closest town to Telluride is Montrose. United Airlines flies from most Australian capital cities to Los Angeles with connecting flights to Denver and Montrose. (www.unitedairlines.com.au)

The Hotel Telluride's patented Incredible Bed means a good night's sleep – natural feather bedding, down comforter, and a selection of pillows to suit all desires. (www.hoteltelluride.com)

Value Tours offer a seven-night package flying United Airlines to Montrose from Brisbane, staying at Cimarron Hotel & Condominiums and a six-day ski pass from \$3062 per person twin-share.

(www.valuetours.com.au, tel: 1300 361 322)
www.tellurideskiresort.com

make you set up camp for a daily pummelling.

It's here that the celebrities hang out, only you won't find them in the hotel foyers. They're more likely to be snug in their multimillion-dollar cabins that skirt the ski runs.

Tom Cruise married Nicole Kidman at Telluride and the first official photos of newborn Suri with Katie Holmes were snapped here. Tom Hanks has a home, Oprah did, Christie Brinkley still

does and Cameron Diaz and Justin Timberlake snowboarded here when they were together.

After two weeks traversing the Rocky Mountain ski villages of Colorado, taking in the heated pavements of Beaver Creek resort with its covered escalators transporting fur-clad folks to the first lift of the day; trekking the Highlands Bowl at Aspen to ski back country and direct to the door of Cloud Nine mountain

restaurant for chilled wine and handing my skis to the valet at the door, I simply thought it could not get any better.

Telluride proves me wrong.

Folks are hospitable and glamour is understated in Telluride.

There's Allreds private mountain club perched high on a mountain top with floor-to-ceiling glass walls providing what feels like a painting but we know is an actual view.

Ski boots are left at the door, snug booties handed over and gourmet cuisine served up on white linen.

We lobbied in on the weekend of the annual Chocolate Ball when locals and tourists descend upon the convention centre in the Mountain Village in themed retro 1970s' gear.

The lift queues in the morning are practically non-existent.

I suspect many revellers have yet to raise their heads until I discover the same phenomena the next day.

Telluride is still "undiscovered" and big enough to feel like few crowds on the slopes.